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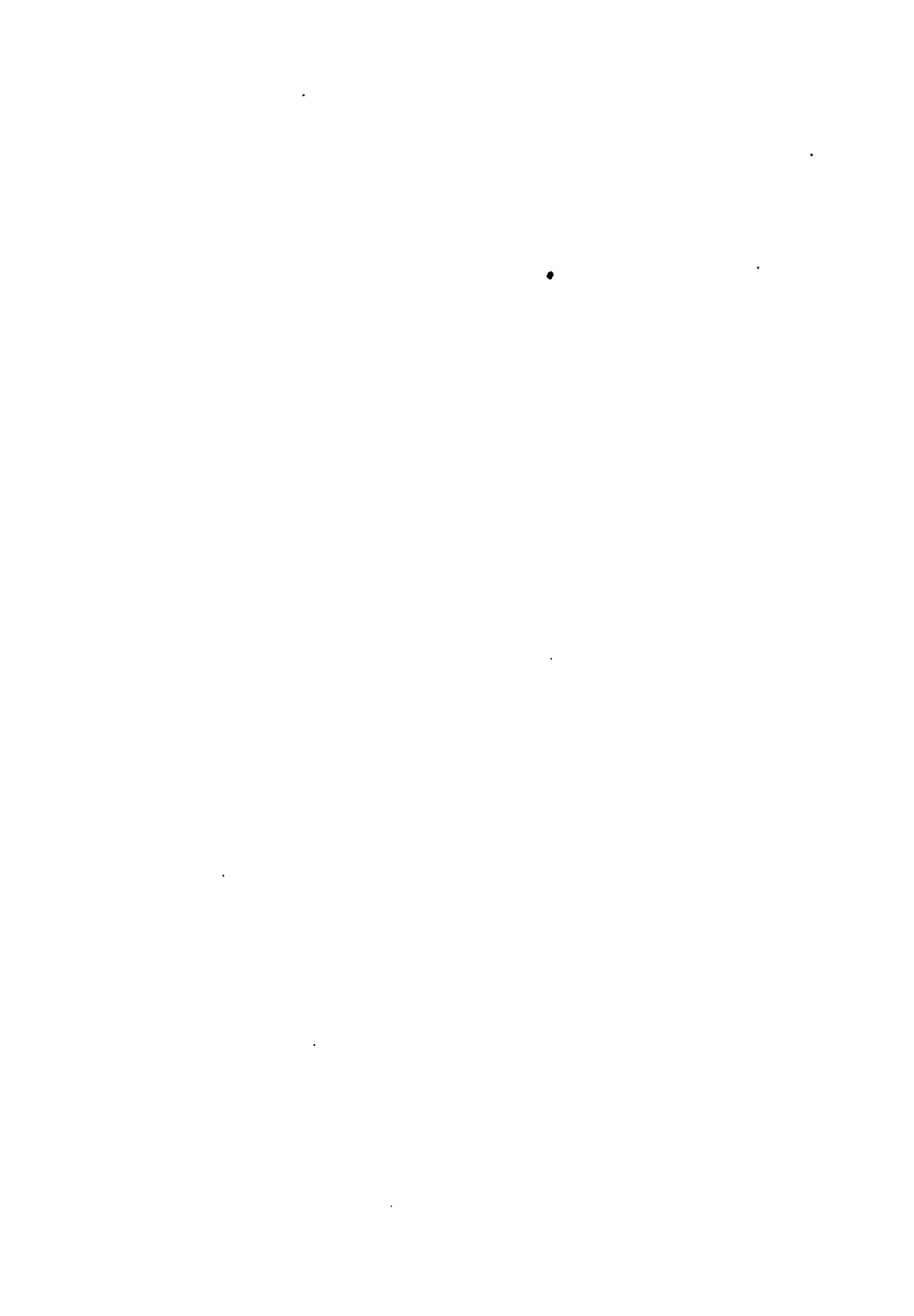
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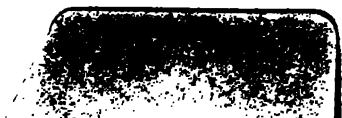
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LAYS AND VERSES



LAYS AND VERSES

BY

NIMMO CHRISTIE

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

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1896

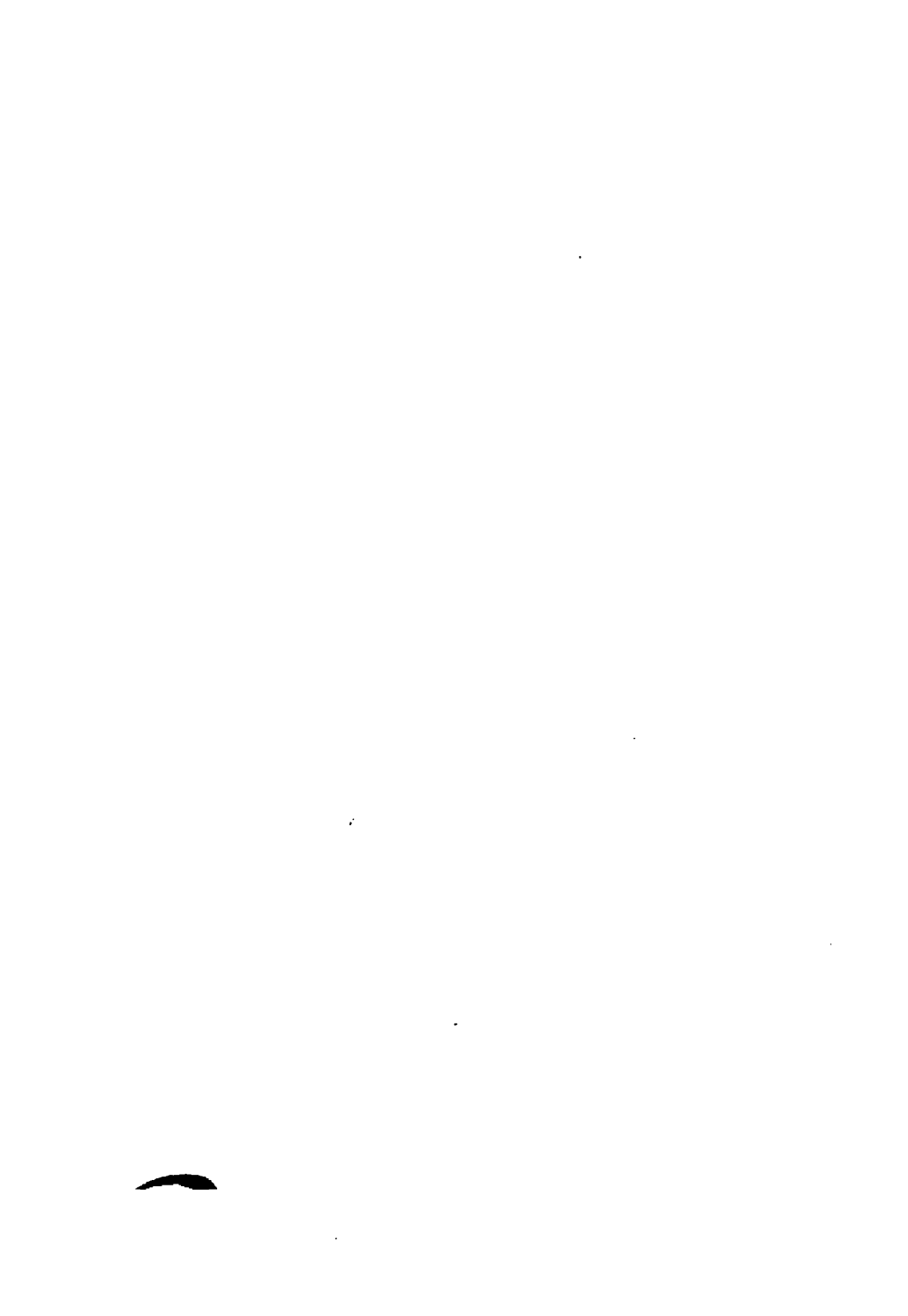
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1896



NOTE

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CONTENTS

LAYS OF THE WHITE ROSE AND SCOTTISH VERSES

	PAGE
CHARLIE'S MEN	1
THE SILENT PIPES	3
A ROYAL REIVER	5
A HIGHLAND WOOING—1745	8
WIDOWED	10
THE FAIRY MINISTER	12
THE FAIRIES' PORTION	15
FEY	17
THE TRYST	19
A LAMENT	21
THE WITCH	22
THE BORDER BALLADS	24

MISCELLANEOUS

WITHIN THE CONVENT	27
IN A GONDOLA	29
THE FAIRY AND THE CHILD	30
A GATHERED FLOW'RET	33
TO A YOUTHFUL SINGER	35
A SEASIDE PICTURE	36
THE IDEAL	38
BY THE LOCHSIDE	40
A CHILD'S WISH	41

	PAGE
AU REVOIR	43
THE WHISPERING WOOD	45
IN THE DEEP	47
TRANSCIENCE	48
THE DROUGHT	49
MIRAGE	51
DIVORCED	52
USE AND DISUSE	53
'SUMER IS I-CUMEN IN'	54
A TRIO	55
A LITTLE SPACE	56
'BROKEN LIGHTS'	57
A DREAM	58
THE SOURCE OF BEAUTY	59

SONNETS

AUGUST MANNS	61
GIL BLAS	62
WILLOW-SHADED	63
ALONE	64
LIKENESS	65
ALTERNATIVES	66
FROM THE DEPTHS	67

IN FRENCH FORM

BALLADE OF SIR WALTER	69
BALLADE	71
RONDEAU : IN THE GALLERY	73
TRIOLETS	74

DRAMATIC SCENE

IN A HOSPITAL	75
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LAYS OF THE WHITE ROSE
AND
SCOTTISH VERSES

CHARLIE'S MEN

THE sky was grey and the grass was green
When the Bonnie Prince in our glen was seen ;
The grass was green and the sky was grey
When on his horse he rode away ;
When he rode away with a score and ten
Who were blithe to go with Charlie's Men.


O loath was I from my love to part—
Hamish the tall with the steadfast heart—
But the Prince kissed lightly my cheek and brow,
And 'Lend me,' he said, 'your sweetheart now,
And when we return victorious, then
You shall wed the bravest of Charlie's Men.'

I watched them springing down the brae,
For they took the short and the dangerous way ;
I saw their spears gleam far and bright
Till the fir trees hid them from my sight,
Till faint and small as the chirp of a wren
Were the pipes that played for Charlie's Men.

The sky was blue, green was the grass,
When joyful word came up the pass ;
The grass was green, the sky was blue,
And dark-browed Malcolm's dream was true !
Although the foe for one were ten,
The fight was won by Charlie's Men !

But other tales we had to mark
As grass grew grey and skies grew dark,
And the strath was filled with tear and sigh
For sires and sons who had marched to die ;
And Hamish, my own, the pride of the glen,
Lay dead on the field with Charlie's Men.

I might be blind, for I never see
But spear-heads glintin' bonnilie ;
I might be deaf, for I only hear
The pibroch ringing shrill and clear ;
And by moor and meadow, by burn and ben,
My thoughts are thoughts of Charlie's Men.



THE SILENT PIPES

THEY'LL raise the reel and rant no more,
 Nor play the springs they played of yore,
 When lads and lasses tripped the floor
 From gloamin' until early ;
 No more a bridal lilt they'll blow,
 Or wailing coranach, although
 Death's hands should lay a kinsman low,
 The pipes that played for Charlie.

Glenfinnan heard their joyful note,
 And distant straths and hills remote,
 When in the northern air afloat
 The Royal flag waved fairly ;
 They blew a welcome to Lochiel,
 And many a chieftain's heart of steel
 Beat high to hear the warlike peal
 Of pipes that played for Charlie.

O, lightly marched the Highland host,
 And o'er the Fords of Frew they crost,
 And lightly faced the sleet and frost,
 Though tartans clad them barely ;

THE SILENT PIPES

Before them Cope was fain to flee,
They took St. Johnstone and Dundee,
The Bailies heard with little glee
The pipes that played for Charlie.

They sang fu' low at Holyrood
To suit the gentle ladies' mood,
The ladies fair, of gentle blood,
Whose smiles the Prince lo'ed rarely ;
But when at Prestonpans they played
The Lowland lads were sore dismayed,
Their horsemen ran, and ne'er drew blade,
From pipes that played for Charlie.

They blew a last, a mournful strain,
When on Drummossie's weary plain
The day was lost, and hope had gane,
And hearts were sinking sairly.
No more they'll swell the pibroch shrill,
Or in the dale, or on the hill ;
For ever now the voice is still
Of pipes that played for Charlie.

A ROYAL REIVER

I'LL tell ye o' a reiver,
A rantin', wanton reiver,
A dauntless Highland reiver
As ever stood in shoon.
His hand was o' the fairest,
His smile was o' the rarest,
His fate it was the sairest,
Wha should hae worn a croon.

In mirky caverns lyin'
Nor dule was his nor sighin',
Though Geordie's men were spyin'
To north an' south an' west.
Though we were wae an' eerie,
Although our hearts were wearie,
Our Charlie aye was cheerie,
The bravest and the best.

A ROYAL REIVER

He took wi' happy bearin'
His puir an' modest sharin'
O' meal—our scanty farin'—
Till every grain was gane.
O then we supped on sorrow,
We could nor buy nor borrow ;
But Charlie laughed, To-morrow
We'll give good-bye to pain.

Hid 'mong the purple heather
In misty mornin' weather,
Red-coats an' kye together
We saw like ghosts gae by.
The beef was young an' dainty,
The sojers ane an' twenty.
We're five, said Charlie, plenty,
My lads, to lift the kye.

So, when the skies were weepin',
An' horse an' men were sleepin',
Through whins an' bracken creepin',
We forced our stealthy way.
We feasted at the daw'in',
An' stayed our hunger gnawin',
Nor ever paid the lawin'
For stirkies led astray.

There ne'er was loon like Charlie ;
Our hearts were wi' him fairly.

O wae's me, late an' airly !

He lost his land an' croon.

We lo'ed our royal reiver,

Our rantin', wanton reiver—

As bold a Highland reiver

As ever stepped in shoon.

A HIGHLAND WOOING—1745

LASSIE, gin the wars were o'er,
 I wad tak' ye to my sheilin',
 Where ye hear the Garry roar,
 Where the eagle high is wheelin'.
 I wad dry your tears o' sorrow ;
 Ye should laugh and sing once more
 At the dawn o' ilka morrow,
 Lassie, gin the wars were o'er.

Ye should hae a gude milk coo ;
 Cacklin' hens to keep you cheerie ;
 Ye should card and spin the 'oo
 When the wintry nights were eerie.
 I wad tell ye mony a story
 Wild o' deeds and men o' yore—
 Traitor Whig, and loyal Tory—
 Lassie, gin the wars were o'er.

Wad ye hae me noo turn back
 When the war-pipe loud is thrillin' ?
 If the Lowland men are slack,
 Highland hearts are staunch an' willin'.

In the chair o' Royal Charlie
Sits a loon frae some far shore—
Faith ! we'll ship him back right airly,
Lassie, gin the wars were o'er.

Dinna fear for shot or sword—
Nane shall droon are meant for hangin' !
If ye miss my face and word
When the clansmen hame are thrangin',
Gie a prayer for them that's sleepin' ;
Ye'll get sweethearts by the score—
Tak' ye ane, and spare your weepin',
Lassie, gin the wars are o'er.

WIDOWED

RANALD, my son, in the long-ago
We stood on this rock as we stand to-day ;
Dim in the distance was Ben-y-gloe,
The Garry beneath us was swift and gray ;
And over the hills and across the lea
Came the tartaned Clans with the bold Dundee.

Chill was the mist on the whins and grass,
But my heart grew warm as we saw them come.
Sudden and faintly, far down the Pass,
A bugle rang, and we heard a drum ;
And faces lit with a warlike glee
In the loyal ranks of the bold Dundee !

Ay, you were here, but your years were few,
And I clasped you close as the Clans went by.
Ranald, my son, I had only you !
For a man may fight, and a man may die,
And your father's form was brave to see
In the stalwart ranks of the bold Dundee !

God ! how they charged through the smoke and flame
When the steel-tipped Southern lines were near !
Weeping, I called on sweet Mary's name,
And prayed—alas ! there was none to hear.
What mattered the foeman's flight to me
When your father lay with the dead Dundee ?

Ranald, I charge you, my joy, my son,
Should your true king come to his Scottish shore,
Follow, wherever he leads you on,
With steadfast heart and your keen claymore.
Let your blows fall swift as the blows of three,
When you think of your sire and the dead Dundee.

THE FAIRY MINISTER

These verses deal with the fate of the Rev. Robert Kirk, M.A., minister of Aberfoyle. He wrote a work, called 'The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies,' in 1691, which, edited by Mr. Andrew Lang, has been recently republished. In 1692 he was found, or rather his body was found, on a fairy hill. He was buried in Aberfoyle Kirkyard, but soon afterwards appeared to a kinsman of his, and said that he was in fairyland.

O, GANG na near the fairy knowe,
 Whar the Avon-Dhu flows still and deep,
 Whar nae bird liltis upon the bough,
 An' never fearfu' leverets leap,
 When the moon shines white like a new-shorn fleece,
 There sport an' fling the men o' peace.

An' speak nae ill o' their elfish work—
 Their een are sharp, an' their ears are keen ;
 An' laugh na loud—in the air they lurk,
 In the breath o' the brier they float unseen.
 His joy shall dwine an' his dule shall grow
 Wha tells o' deeds that the star-beams know.

I' the kirkyard green there stands a stane,
An' a learned name is carven there ;
But whether he sleeps beneath wha's gane,
Or whether he dwells some ither where,
There's nane can tell ; but his fearless pen
Was wise in the ways o' peacefu' men.

On the fairy knowe we found him dead,
A waefu' end to his unco lear !
Nae wound there was on his breist or head,
But wee, wee laughs saft filled the air,
Like the buzz o' a hunder thoosand bees,
When we left the knowe o' the men o' peace.

An' when five days they had passed an' twa,
Amang the shadows o' birk an' aik,
He stood wha sae late had been ta'en awa,
An' there wi' ane o' his kinsmen spake :
' Nae mair, nae mair shall I walk,' said he,
' Where the Avon rins by rock an' lea.

' My limbs are bound wi' an elfin chain
To a warld that has neither sun nor star,
Whar never fa's the gentle rain,
Whar nae kirk bells or Sabbaths are ;
Whar nameless thochts in a nameless tongue
By wild, wee lips are said an' sung.'

Sae, gang na near the fairy knowe,
Whar the Avon-Dhu flows deep an' still,
When a' the heavens are in a lowe
Wi' stars ; an' mind that path an' hill
Shall never resound to his step again
Wha was skilly in ways o' the elfin men.

THE FAIRIES' PORTION

MILK for the chieftain an' his leddy,
Gae bring it hame an' hae it ready,
 My fair-haired lassie ;
But spill a taste on the fairy knowe
Whar grass is greenest an' sourocks grow,
An' shadows fa' frae the hazel bough ;
 Forget na, lassie.

Milk for the fisher an' the reaper,
For the waukrife auld an' the young-faced sleeper,
 Bare-fitted lassie ;
Carry it safely doon the glen,
But hae in mind the Quiet Men.
Gie them ae drap for our ilka ten ;
 Forget na, lassie.

THE FAIRIES' PORTION

An' so in ease we'll bide an' peace,
Our corn shall rise, our sheep increase,
 My smilin' lassie.
The guid folk to the kind are kind
They'll no' untie the sheaf we bind
Nor tak' at nicht whate'er we find
 By daylight, lassie.

Alow the stars they'll whirl and fling
Wi' twinklin' feet i' their emerald ring,
 My willin' lassie ;
Nor ever think a thocht o' harm
Nor ever need a holy charm,
An' we shall live without alarm
 So mind them, lassie !

FEY

THERE comes a ship to the lang toon,
 To the lang, lang toon ;
 But nane is there the sicht to see,
 For a' are sleepin'—a' but me
 An' the yellow mune,
 My freen the mune.

This ship that comes to the lang toon,
 To the lang, lang toon,
 Has ropes o' siller an' sails o' crape,
 An' the skipper—oh ! he has an unco shape
 An' a waefu' froon.
 I fear his froon !

When a' is still i' the lang toon,
 I' the lang, lang toon,
 Its mast comes round by the kelpies' rock,
 Whar e'en the sea-maws daurna flock,
 And there is nae soun'—
 There's ne'er a soun' !

An' whiles there's ane frae the lang toon,
Frae the lang, lang toon,
 An' whiles there's ane, an' whiles there's twa
 That gangs aboard, an' the ship's awa !
For the wark is dune,
It's owre and dune.

When mornin' comes i' the lang toon,
I' the lang, lang toon,
 There's some that's greetin' for them that's gane
 Whar I can tell, an' I alane—
An' the yellow mune,
My freen the mune.

THE TRYST

I MADE a tryst for Lucklaw Hill
 Wi' a gentle knight and gay ;
 I kept the tryst on Lucklaw Hill,
 Clay-cauld my dear knight lay.

.
 I met him linkin' by the thorn,
 An' O, his laugh was sweet
 As ripples on a summer morn
 Where liltin' waters meet.

He praised the lily o' my broo,
 The rose upon my cheek ;
 Nae thirsty gowan drinks the dew
 Sae glad's I heard him speak.

'An' will ye make a tryst wi' me,
 Young Margret o' the Mill ?'
 'O, I will make a tryst wi' ye
 By the birks o' Lucklaw Hill.'

THE TRYST

He hadna passed across the burn
That round the muirland crept,
When from behind the flow'rin' thorn
It was Herd Andro crept.

'O, fause is woman's tongue,' cried he,
'An' fause her winsome face ;
An' wearie is the changefu' sea,
An' a' this wild green place !

'O, fause is woman's word,' cried he,
'Ye ne'er shall kiss him mair.
On Lucklaw Hill ye'll tryst wi' me
Or meet a dead man there !'

.

I made a tryst for Lucklaw Hill
Wi' a gentle knight an' gay ;
I kept the tryst on Lucklaw Hill,
Clay-cauld my dear knight lay.

A LAMENT

FORLORN is the lowland, forsaken the hill ;
The deer in the forest browse fearless and still ;
The eagle floats down from his home on the steep ;
For Torquil is folded for ever in sleep.

The war-pipe may shriek to the rock and the lea,
The river may rioting leap to the sea,
In anger the wild bull like thunder may roar,
But Torquil sleeps on—he will hear them no more.

His eye now is dim that was bright as a star,
And quiet his heart that was fervent in war,
And past like the blossoms that perished with May
His voice that was sweet in love story or lay.

How soon shall his name be forgot, ah, how soon !
Like the dew of the morn that is gone ere the noon.
How soon too his kinsfolk, who sorrow and weep,
Like Torquil shall lay down their sorrow and sleep !

THE WITCH

THE mornin' hour an' the openin' flower
 For the lass o' the licht blue e'e ;
 The burnin ray i' the noon o' day
 For the man his wark to dree ;
 For the lazy rest as the sun gaes west—
 The bonnie black nicht for me !

It's sair to bide by the ingleside
 Through morn an' eve an' noon ;
 A weary life has a puir auld wife
 Wi' the clavers o' the toon ;
 I' the lift I prow! wi' the bat an' owl
 When the nicht's withoot a moon.

There are luckies three wha meet wi' me
 On steeds o' birk an' whin—
 There's Madge Macqueen, an' Thoomless Jean,
 An' Bell o' the Beardit Chin.
 We skim an' skirl till the firtaps dirl
 An' the clouds shak' at the din.

But it's best to float in a riddle-boat
 When the Witch Dub's in a lowe ;
To tack an' twist through the reek an' mist,
 To nod an' beck an' bow,
To smirk an' sing to our ain Dark King
 Wi' his takin' hornie pow !

The barn-cock craws, the mornin' daws :
 Our happy sport has ceased ;
By the ingleside I'm fain to bide
 Loathed baith by man an' beast.
O, it's ill to keep a witch-heart deep
 Within an auld wife's breast !

THE BORDER BALLADS

THAE latter days are peacefu' days,
But weary a', an' lang ;
Nae mair in dusky greenwood ways
We hear an elfin sang ;

Nae mair the gallant sword an' spur
Gae jinglin' o'er the lea,
While startled wild birds wi' a whirr
Tak' to their wings an' flee.

O for the blithesome days an' bold
When life was keen an' full ;
When stirks were neither bought nor sold,
An' blood was never cool !

When every wind frae east or west
Had news or gude or ill ;
And hearts o' maidens duntit fest
To hear the warhorn shrill !

On Carterhaugh the grass is green,
But Tamlane is awa'—
Him an' the gay-clad Fairy Queen
Nae livin' e'e e'er saw.

The Eden yet rins wan an' wide
Beneath the glintin' moon,
But pretty men o' Teviotside
Ne'er swim to Carlisle toon.

Kirkconnell kens nae Helen noo
Wad pine in deathless sorrow.
Where is a lover staunch an' true
Like him who died on Yarrow?

But though where elves were wont to dance
There fa's the ploughlad's heel,
And though we hear for shock o' lance
The ceaseless, dronin' wheel;

Though latter days are peacefu' days,
An' weary a', an' lang;
Our hearts can loup, our cheeks can blaze,
At Border tale or sang.

MISCELLANEOUS

WITHIN THE CONVENT

MATINS and Vespers go and come
 With monotone and cadence drear ;
 My spirit hears a rolling drum,
 A death-cry rings within mine ear !

In vain I tell my beads alway
 And mutter Paternosters o'er ;
 In vain I bend the knee to pray—
 My thoughts are of a distant shore.

The Priest in chasuble and stole
 Sings mass ; to me he sings in vain.
 The solemn organ's thunder-roll
 No entrance to my soul can gain.

I cross the breast and bow the head,
 And Ave Mary meekly say ;
 And think the while upon the dead,
 And hear a voice now still for aye.

From out my close-barred cell I see
A liquid sky of azure hue;
And ah ! his glance comes back to me—
Not Blessed Mary's robe of blue.

The perfumed incense white and dense
That hides the altar from mine eyes
Recalls his breath to quickened sense,
Sweeter than airs of Paradise.

He marched with comrades brave to die
When freedom's flag was first unfurled ;
And I think not of Heaven on high,
Although I left an empty world.

Matins and Vespers go and come,
And nuns sing low and nuns sing clear ;
My spirit hears a rolling drum—
A death-cry rings within mine ear.

IN A GONDOLA

O LOVE, if love be fond and free,
Is like the lulled lagoon,
When tide and western wind agréé
Beneath a summer moon.
Ah ! sweet all other songs beyond,
The song of love, if free and fond.

But love, if love be feigned and false,
Is as the furious wave
That smites the sea coast's rocky walls
And forms the fisher's grave.
Ah ! full of woe, with discords pained,
The song of love, if false and feigned.

THE FAIRY AND THE CHILD

LITTLE rosy Golden-pate,
Fairies small and fairies great,
Charmed with your eyes of blue,
Bid me tell a tale to you,
Bid me ask you to a feast,
You of mortal kind the least,
Where you'll hob and nob with kings,
Velvet-clad and gay with rings.

Thank you, fairy green and slim,
I hob-nob with Baby Jim !

You shall fare on dainty roots
And on strange, untasted fruits,
Ripened in no western sun,
But where hidden fountains run
Underneath the mountains dun.
Yellow wines and green and red—
Dews that pearls and rubies shed,
And the emerald, baleful, bright—
To your heart shall give delight.

Silver white your cup shall be,
Won in playful amity
From the gnomes who never sleep
In their caverns dark and deep.
All these rare things for you wait :
Come with me then, Golden-pate.

Fairy, you are very good,
But I live on simple food.

Foolish ! foolish ! you must know
'Tis a lily land below.
Fear not ! for there is no night,
Though the sun lends not its light ;
Flowers are ours that never fade ;
Light dwells with us, but no shade ;
Like a little prince you'll be,
Drest in blue, and at the knee
Gartered with gold adder skin ;
Fays and elves, your smile to win,
Shall obey your unsaid thought ;
Every boon will come unsought.
If you weary for a tale,
Poets, whose romances fail
Never, shall your ears assail,
Rhyming of a haunted lake,
Or a dim, mysterious brake,
Where lies coiled the hooded snake.
If for pastime you shall ask,
Ours an easy, merry task !

We will teach you how to glide
On, and o'er, and 'neath the tide,
Like a swallow on the wing,
Like a cygnet in the spring,
Like the lean and supple ling.
Or your feet shall scatheless stray
Up the shining Milky Way,
Past the Dog-star baying ire,
Past the Warrior red as fire,
Where we'll leap from star to star
Light as forest squirrels are.
Golden-pate, I bid you come
To the fairies' pleasant home.

I would like to see your land,
And to take your guiding hand—
Hark ! I hear my mother call.
Good-bye ; home is best of all !

A GATHERED FLOW'RET

With the flowers you came in June-tide,
And you left us in the May ;
Like a sunray at the noontide
Was your smile in winter's way.
Ah ! no more, no more hereafter
Is there joy in night or day,
For you came with June-tide laughter,
But you passed with tears of May.

There were roses red to meet you,
There were happy hearts to bless,
There were skies of blue to greet you,
There were kind arms to caress ;
Hands and lips to tease and kiss you
In your riot or your play—
All the things that loved you miss you
Since you vanished with the May.

A GATHERED FLOW'RET

For your form of mirth and beauty
Was the earth too bare and cold ?
Were we slack in loving duty
In the happy days of old ?
Or, when evening skies were gleaming,
Did your fancy heavenward stray,
Where the ceaseless light is beaming
That you left us in the May ?

Not our sweetest songs could charm you
To abide with us for long ;
Earthly strains might never warm you
Who had heard an angel's song !
You had breathed our air to quicken
Hearts of dull and sordid clay ;
And you left them softened, stricken,
When we parted in the May.

But on you time leaves no traces,
Lays no falsehoods on your tongue ;
Changeless 'mid all changing faces,
Death has made you ever young.
Pure and stainless as the fleeting
Lily of that glad June day
When we gave you loving greeting
So you faded in the May.

TO A YOUTHFUL SINGER

SWEET child, you try to stamp in vain
Your sad romance upon our heart ;
We cannot feel your mimic pain,
Although you sing with graceful art.

The tale you tell of hopes deceived,
Of love despised, and wished-for death,
Is surely hard to be believed
From lips that draw such easy breath !

Ah, dear ! no one may voice aright
The grief that has not felt the sting ;
And they whose thoughts are dark as night
And who have suffered cannot sing.

A SEASIDE PICTURE

LIKE a statue on the beach
Looks she wistful at the ocean ;
Scarcely can her eyesight reach
Where the boats, with swaying motion,
For the herring shoals are steering,
With their sails of russet brown,
Like a swarm of moths appearing
On a streamlet at sundown.

Gentle wavelets lap the strand ;
Quietly the darkness falleth ;
Peace is over tide and land ;
Not a thrush or sea-gull calleth,
Lines are baited ; nets are mended ;
For a little, toil is o'er.
She, by restless thoughts attended,
Stands and watches on the shore.

Vague imaginings of ill
Seize her as the light is going :
Though to-night the sea is still,
Morn may hear the wild winds blowing !
Life seems but a weary waiting,
Through the calms or through the gales,
With a heart-fear unabating
For the home-returning sails.

THE IDEAL

It flutters on before us,
A bird of plumage white ;
Its loveliness casts o'er us
A spell, and with delight
We strive to view it nearer—
To snare it if we may ;
And dearer, ever dearer,
It grows from day to day.

Sometimes, when mist-clouds hover,
And heart and thought are sad,
No more can we discover
The bird that made us glad.
Then from a hidden hollow
A note comes clear and strong,
And ardently we follow
Its free, compelling song.

But we shall reach it never
While life is ours and breath :
It nests beyond endeavour,
Within the veil of death.
Thrice happy he who passes
Where once it stayed to sing,
And finds, amid the grasses,
A feather from its wing.

BY THE LOCHSIDE

A LITTLE loch amid the hills ;
A blackbird piping on the thorn
A song whose careless music thrills
A heart weary and city-worn.

A south wind telling of the flow'rs,
Of ruddy heath and dusky pine ;
A summer day's long, lazy hours
That lull and soothe like drowsy wine.

'Surely the wells of peace are here !'
So speaks the weary city wight ;
'No huckster's voice is heard anear,
Here is no trace of pain or fight.'

He knows not that an hour ago,
Ere yet the sun was warm and high,
Where bend the reeds and lilies blow,
A dead face eyed the smiling sky !

A CHILD'S WISH

DEEP, deep in the heart of the forest,
By pools that are shining and still,
When spellings and sums trouble sorest
I would I might wander at will.
There flowers are lovely and vary,
The moonbeams are patched on the lea,
And fancy says many a fairy
Is waiting to frolic with me.

Peas-blossom and Cobweb his brother
Are there with their sovereign bright ;
Gay Puck, Moth, and many another
Wee elf from the Midsummer Night.
They're graceful, and nimble, and wary,
Can perch like the birds on a tree—
I wish that I too were a fairy,
That Puck would learn lessons for me !



Alas ! I'm aware I am dreaming,
That fairies are gone long ago ;
The bright eyes among the ferns beaming
Are dewdrops—just dewdrops, I know.
But yet, though my fancies are airy,
I wish that the old times could be,
That deep in the forest a fairy
Were waiting to frolic with me.

AU REVOIR

WHEN I am laid in sleep
Amid the clay,
I pray thee not to weep ;
Where thou dost stray,
If spirits soar or creep,
Shall be my way.

Not in the gloomy night
I'll come to thee—
I'd have thee link with light
My memory,
And think the eyes are bright
. Thou canst not see—

But with the radiant grace
That haunts the dawn
My hasty feet shall trace
Hill, lake, and lawn,
And I shall kiss thy face
Till light is gone.

The rose's breath shall hide
Me ; unrevealed,
I'll whisper at thy side
In wood and field ;
And where dim waters glide
Watch thee, concealed.

Closely thy lips meet mine—
Thy loyal store
Of love I part divine ;
When life is o'er
My soul shall compass thine
For evermore !

THE WHISPERING WOOD

WHY does the head of the green birch bend
To the listening fir?
Why to the lime does the ash tree tend,
And rustle and stir?
Have they some secret to lisp to-day
In a stealthy mood?
Why do you nod in a mystic way,
Whispering Wood?

Whispering Wood, do you speak of the hum
Of the velvet bee?
Heard you the lark, when the morn had come,
Piping its glee?
Have you a lover's tale to tell
Of the rose's blush?
Or is your story a funeral knell
Of the mellow thrush?

Is there a spot in your inmost heart—

A ferny glade—

Where, in the moonlight, fairies dart

'Mid the shine and shade ?

Do you relate, O Whispering Wood,

In a murmur low,

Their elfin doings, kind or rude,

When the starbeams glow ?

Ah ! you have looked on my own, my sweet,

With the eyes of blue ;

Seen the print of her naked feet

In the morning dew ;

Watched her tresses of brown float free

In the fresh, wild air ;

And myriad leaves of your every tree

Proclaim her fair !

Ask for the lusty and strong winds' aid

To utter her praise ;

Sing of her airy grace displayed

In your shadowy ways ;

Wave aloft your branches and cry

To the heavens above

Loudly the morning purity

Of my perfect love.

IN THE DEEP

Not by the grey walls where his kindred lie ;
Not where the daisies star the mossy lea ;
Nor where the village Sabbath feet pass by,
'Mid mirth of linnet and 'mid drone of bee ;
Not where the melancholy willow weeps
He sleeps.

No blue familiar hills around him stand ;
No pine-wood scents for him the summer air ;
No sheep bell stirs his dark and silent land ;
No piping herd boy, sunny-faced, is there :
Where man ne'er sows and no man ever reaps
He sleeps.

Grey waters ceaseless sigh above his head ;
The gull shrieks loudly to his heedless ears ;
Dank sea-weed forms his mantle and his bed ;
The rock his pillow through the dreamless years :
Where spectral shapes float in the shadowy deeps
He sleeps.

TRANSCIENCE

THE linnet pipes amid the silent leaves
That crown the steep ;
Softly the bosom of the water heaves
In dreamless sleep.

Far in the west, beyond the purple haze
Mantling the wold,
The jewelled broideries of the sunset blaze
On cloth of gold.

This is a holy hour, a charmèd clime,
With beauty blest !
Canst thou not here enfold thy wings, O Time,
And with us rest ?

Ah no ! the night shrouds sky, and sea, and shore ;
A chilling air—
Cling closer, child, and kiss me o'er and o'er ;
Thou too art fair !

THE DROUGHT

GIVE us, O God, O give us rain ;
 Our sheep fail on the scorched plain ;
 Our thirsty cattle faintly low
 By empty pools where no reeds grow ;
 No corn springs green ; brown lies the grass ;
 And overhead the skies are brass.

On city wall, in chamber dim
 Rose prayer and penitential hymn
 At morn, at night, and at the noon,
 From week to week, from moon to moon,
 In vain : they saw no grey clouds pass
 O'er plain or pool ; the skies were brass.

'Twas night, and where the watchers wait
 A wanderer stood beside the gate ;
 His face was worn, his form was thin.
 'Ye may not, stranger, enter in,'
 The watchers said. 'We have, alas !
 Nor drink nor food ; the skies are brass.

Till far beyond our city wall
No foot of sheep or goat may fall ;
The streams are dry ; our flocks are dead.'
' Praise ye the Lord for all,' he said ;
' He still is kind as aye He was.'
They made reply, ' The skies are brass.'

' *Our* land,' he cried, ' is desolate ;
There now the Painim holds his state ;
Our king is slain, our wealth is gone.
Your homes are yours through God alone :
Not even Painim hosts could pass
O'er deserts under skies of brass !'

MIRAGE

He dwelt amid the silent hills,
Beneath a sky of grey,
Where no world-clamour ever thrills
The long, secluded day.

The murmur of the mountain stream
He heard as in a trance—
It sped to lands where banners gleam,
Where light-limbed maidens dance !

He saw the ghostly gull at night
Wheel o'er him eerily,
The while it screeched with wild delight
The glories of the sea.

Ah ! shepherd lad, we too have heard
Vain babble from the rills ;
And heard, alas ! the false sea-bird
'Mid dear, forsaken hills.

DIVORCED

WHEN I remember what thou art,
And what thou wert to me
Ere yet our lives were rent apart
'Mid mocking ribaldry ;

And that the kiss of shame has soiled
Lips that were pressed to mine ;
That eyes to win whose glance I toiled
Are redly dull with wine ;

I would that thought were passed away,
And memory were fled,
Or that thy sin-stained body lay
With the unsinning dead.

USE AND DISUSE

TAKE not the lily from its stem,
Take not the rose,
For, pluckt, the light that lives in them
A brief hour glows.

And yet in green, untrodden ways,
Moist with the shower,
Unculled, they bloom in summer days
But one sweet hour.


' SUMER IS I-CUMEN IN'

MANY a year has waxed and waned
Since our sires made lusty din,
Carolling with glee unfeigned,
' Sumer is i-cumen in.'

Still we sing the self-same song
When the May-fly sails the stream,
When, where linnets chirp and throng,
Scarce through leaves the blue may gleam.

Buds and blossoms that they hailed
Like the winter snows have past ;
Gone the singers' selves, unwailed,
Unremembered at the last.

So our summer shall decay,
Such the fame that we shall win.
Ah ! the perfume of the hay !
Sing we, ' Summer's coming in !'



A TRIO

WHERE willows wave, where waters flow
She dwelt ; I heard her accents low
Mix in their music long ago.

The droning of the velvet bee,
The trilling lark's wild minstrelsy
I heard not—hearkening to the three.

To-day the willows sigh anear,
To-day the streamlet trebles clear ;
Her song immortals only hear.

A LITTLE SPACE

THE mad wind blows a little space,
Then sinks into a breath and dies ;
In meadows where its path we trace,
And 'mid the corn, the poppies rise.

A little space the sunbeam falls,
And warms and brightens ere the night ;
And apples glow on orchard walls,
And roses bloom where it was light.

So, when we pass into the dark,
And think to leave no record here,
Some friend unknown, perchance, may mark
The blank, and hold our memory dear—
Some one may hear with radiant face
The song we sang a little space.

'BROKEN LIGHTS'

THE stars that shimmer white,
The changing moon through heaven that ranges,
Shine with a borrowed light
From that bright orb that never changes.
The taper's slender flame,
The fire that in the furnace rages,
Are shadows that proclaim
The light that warms and lightens all the ages.

What are the kindly ties
Of earth that hold us to each other—
The trust of childish eyes,
The manly faith of friend or brother,
Affection deep and pure
Binding two hearts that nought can sever,
But rays of love obscure
From the Great Love that loves us all for ever?

A DREAM

I WANDERED in a dreary land
Where man ne'er trod ;
A wilderness of slime and sand
Unknown of God.

Dim forms were in the gloomy air
(So ran my dream) ;
I saw, half veiled in mist and hair,
Wan faces gleam.

Upon my ear wild music smote,
Not all unknown :
At times would swell a triumph note,
At times a groan.

Surely this melancholy land
I paced one day !
In other times I must have scanned
These phantoms grey !

Thus deeming, loud in fear I cried,
'What realm is this ?'
A stern and distant voice replied,
'Thy heart's abyss !'

THE SOURCE OF BEAUTY

A YEAR ago, a year ago
We trod this hill together ;
The leaping stream was all aglow
With light amid the heather ;
We saw the bluebell's bended head,
And heard the lark's voice ringing—
Ah ! happy day for ever dead
When all the world was singing.

I know the hill is just as fair
To-day as it was ever ;
That wild flow'rs scent the highland air,
That light shines on the river.
As one, now blind, who once had sight
Knows that the sun is beaming,
So I, although I see no light,
Believe the light still gleaming.

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A stern and distant voice replied,
'Thy heart's abyss !'



Dear sealèd eyes that shone so clear !
Dear smile that now is vanished !
Yours was the charm made heaven near,
That every shadow banished.
At night with close-shut eyes I see,
When darksome day is ended,
The beauty of the world with thee
And sunshine ever blended.

SONNETS

AUGUST MANNS

METHOUGHT 'twas only in the long ago,
 In dim, dead lands, and in the lonesome night,
 That men had power to wake, for weal or woe,
 Those who have passed from life and life's delight.
 For in these fretful times we daily grow
 Pettier in every thought, feebler in sight ;
 Groping and grasping by a taper's glow,
 We, with the dark, veil out the planets bright.

But thou, the wielder of a wizard's wand,
 Canst summon from their tombs the mighty dead—
 The sweet, sad soul of Schubert answers thine ;
 Mozart comes at the beckoning of thy hand ;
 And at the nod of thy imperious head
 Beethoven sings grave spirit-strains divine.

GIL BLAS

WE clasped hands when youth was yours and mine,
And all life's winding and alluring ways
Lay dim before us, golden with the blaze
Of what fair flowers ! or dark as poppied wine.
Together we have paced, in shower and shine,
The highways and the meadows ; many days
We've worn the sock and buskin in the gaze
Of stately Don and Señorita fine.

These were the happy times ! Now, worn and old,
I sit anear the hearth and thaw my veins ;
But you are still the youth adventurous, free,
To whom Sangrado did his art unfold ;
And when you speak my weary soul regains
Its fire, and life is lithe hilarity.

WILLOW-SHADED

WHEN thou hadst bade the world and me farewell,
And wert at rest with ever-closed eyes,
As if unknowing, yet, indeed, all-wise
In mysteries no living tongue may tell ;
My hopes and dreams heard in thy passing bell
Their own doom tolled ; yea, every fond surmise
With thee lay dead, no more, methought, to rise,
And earth to me became a prison cell.


Now at thy head there blooms a crimson rose,
And violets are purple at thy feet,
Beneath the over-shadowing willow tree ;
And when I think of thee my spirit glows
With tender thoughts of hours that once were sweet,
And hopes of days eternal that shall be.

ALONE

I KNOW that I again shall meet with thee.

At times, far off, wrapped in death's misty veil,
I see thee, when my soul doth wake and wail
At night, or dreaming by the sunlit sea.
If thou wert lost for ever it might be
That I should gladly hear the world's fair tale
Of strange delights, of joys that flush and fail,
And join the whirling dance or woven glee.

But since thine eyes, twin beacon lights, whose rays
Mark the still anchorage I would attain,
Shine on me, not to right or left I gaze,
But onward. Ah ! my sweet without a stain,
My lips, that pressed thy lips in olden days,
Are widowed till they wed with thine again !



LIKENESS

LONG years ago, amid the buds of May,
 We met and kissed, when life was glad and new ;
 I saw thy true heart in thine eyes of blue,
And knew it better every passing day ;
And, as an artist feels a Master's sway,
 And lines grow firmer, deepens every hue,
 My words and thoughts from thine their fashion
 drew
Through all the years from golden hair to grey.

So that I grieve not with a quenchless grief
 To see thy sealèd lids, thy still white face ;
 For soon I too shall quit the weary light,
And where thou art my soul must find relief,
 Or by the rivers of Eternal Grace
 Or 'mid the everlasting shades of night.

ALTERNATIVES

WHAT shall he write, the Angel with the Book,
 Who notes from birth to death my thoughts and
 deeds?

Shall it read thus : *This is a man who leads
 A life of toil ; on nothing does he look
 Save on his balances ; ease he forsook
 That he might gather wealth more than his needs ;
 The pleasant woods he sees not, nor the meads,
 The leopard-breasted thrush, nor lustrous rook ?*

Or haply shall the heavenly scribe indite
 In characters unerring : *Open-eyed,
 At night, he views the jewelled firmament,
 And heeds God's handiwork by morning light ;
 He culls the blue-bell on the mountain side,
 And, lacking riches, harbours sweet content ?*

FROM THE DEPTHS

NOR bird, nor beast, nor human form is here.

Westward, Schiehallion's nightcap rises blue

In the still air ; wrapt in the sombre hue

And livery of eve the hills appear,

That countless, silent stand afar and near.

Away beneath a shepherd cries ' Halloo ! '

And from the valley, through the smoke and dew,

A child's voice travels to us faint but clear.

Unnoted in the busy street there rise

The quiet hymn, the penitential prayer,

Drowned in the babble of the market-place,

And mixed with folly's loud, unmirthful cries :

But in the Heights, in a serener air,

An ear may hear, beyond the bounds of space.



IN FRENCH FORM

BALLADE OF SIR WALTER

WHEN days are dim and nights are black,
And rain-drops rattle on the pane,
On all the world I turn my back,
Realities call me in vain.
My fancy in a golden chain
Is led to lands and times forgot ;
The wizard waves his wand again—
The magic pen of Walter Scott !

No gallant company I lack
On Highland hill or Lowland plain ;
I hear the clang of swords, the thwack
Of war-axe cleaving helms in twain ;
I join the outlaws' merry train
In Sherwood—green and shady spot—
And bless the loving heart, the brain,
The magic pen of Walter Scott.

With Ochiltree I've many a 'crack' ;
I see the Merry Monarch reign ;
I follow Richard's royal track ;
And mark old Trapbois count his gain ;
I hear the agèd Minstrel's strain ;
And mourn o'er Bonnie Charlie's lot.
Ah ! long amid the dust has lain
The magic pen of Walter Scott.

Envoy

O, writers of to-day, we fain
Would give you fame which dieth not ;
But who shall hold and who retain
The magic pen of Walter Scott ?

BALLADE

OUR life is a piping without a tune ;
 A wind-blown arrow with never an aim ;
 The shadow and sun of a wintry June ;
 A gay ballade with the rhyming lame ;
 A tragical farce ; a serious game ;
 A dream that is glad and grave in sleep ;
 A praise unearned ; an unearned blame—
 Is it better to smile or weep ?

My booklet died with the waning moon
 (I once had a thought of poetic fame).
 One day it was Alice—sweet Alice ! but soon
 'Twas Emma—or Bertha—my true love's name.
 We kissed and vowed, but there's none to claim
 That olden promises I should keep :
 The maid of my heart is a Baronet's dame—
 Is it better to smile or weep ?

We get an unsought, an unthought-of boon ;
To prayer we prayed no answer came ;
Joy shuns us when the blood's at noon,
And follows when we're old and tame.
We sow with toil and reap in shame
While glad hours fly, while sad hours creep :
When cold death comes to quench the flame
Is it better to smile or weep ?

Envoy

Priest, when this pampered and pained frame
Is still, and the wild winds o'er it sweep,
Suppose we have neither bliss nor blame—
Is it better to smile or weep ?

IN THE GALLERY

(RONDEAU)

AMID the gods how oft I've sat
 In olden days, ere life was flat,
 Stale, and unprofitable, 'mong
 The 'horny-handed' old and young,
 My coat a ruin like my hat.

How oft my heart went pitapat
 To hear pale Hamlet's cry, 'A rat !'
 I laughed at Katherine's shrewish tongue
 Amid the gods.

I'm short of sight now as a bat,
 And haunt the stalls, be-ringed and fat ;
 Yet, spite my luxuries, I long
 To sit amid the common throng.
 Ah ! pleasure has its habitat
 Amid the gods !

TRIOLETS

You gave me, love, i' the sweet o' the year,
 A spray of blue and dusky red ;
 And for your sake the flower was dear
 You gave me, love, i' the sweet o' the year.
 'Mid autumn winds, beside your bier,
 I kiss those leaves, now brown and dead,
 You gave me, love, i' the sweet o' the year,
 A spray of blue and dusky red.

I kissed your cheek when winds were sweet—
 Your rose-flushed cheek so warm and soft :
 As one who kisses Mary's feet,
 I kissed your cheek when winds were sweet.
 You hear not words I now repeat,
 And white and chill your face. Ah ! oft
 I kissed your cheek when winds were sweet—
 Your rose-flushed cheek so warm and soft.

One day I thought that Heaven was here,
 Where dwelt an angel with your eyes—
 That this—this was your holy sphere :
 One day I thought that Heaven was here.
 No more your blessed form is near ;
 This cannot, then, be Paradise !
 One day I thought that Heaven was here,
 Where dwelt an angel with your eyes.

DRAMATIC SCENE

IN A HOSPITAL

LORENZA, NURSE, PRIEST

LORENZA *in bed.* *Enter NURSE and PRIEST*

NURSE. The priest is here.

LOR. 'Tis well he is not too late.

My pain is greater, and I draw my breath
With little ease. Yon setting sun that gilds
The whiteness of the room will be at rest
But little before me. Give me the draught,
Good nurse.

NURSE. Ah no, it is not yet the hour.
The drug is potent, and, partaken of
Ere yet the influence of the former draught
Has passed away, would cause a deadly sleep.

LOR. Ah me ! this pain that burns !

NURSE. Have patience, child.

A little while, and bells will ring out seven ;
Then you shall drink. I leave you with the Priest. [*Exit.*]

PRIEST. You sent for me, poor girl, and I am here
To give such comfort as the Church can give ;
To hear confession of your sinful deeds,
And grant you absolution, ere you pass
Where purgatorial fires shall make you clean.

LOR. I thank you, Father, but, before I speak
Of all my many errors, tell me, pray,
Tell me if you know aught of Ysidro.


PRIEST. Think not of him ; turn all your thoughts on
heaven.

LOR. I cannot think of heaven without his presence.

PRIEST. Hush ! child. No murderer's step shall
desecrate

That holy place and fair.

LOR. Yet I have seen
Him in a spot amid the purple vines
Far in the north, where grasses are more green,
And rains are cool, than which, I sometimes think,
The streets of heaven cannot be more fair.
'Twas there he wooed me by the Pyrenees.
He was a muleteer, and once a week
He passed our vineyard. All the lasses there
Watched for his coming—oh, this weary pain !—
For Ysidro was handsome, and his tongue
Smacked of the ardent South, from whence he came.
We gave him grapes, and aye the choicest bunch
Was mine. When he had passed, the world grew dull



To me, and all the birds sang out of tune.
No more I said, 'In three days rest and wage,'
But, 'In five days I'll hear the tinkling bells,
The merry bells that herald Ysidro !'
He wooed and won me, brought me to the South,
To Alicante, and this is the end.

PRIEST. Unhappy girl ! he used you cruelly ;
Passed all his time in wine shops, where he spent
The little you had gained at your fruit stall,
Till on the quay one day in drunken fury
He stabbed you in the breast. Unhappy girl !

LOR. Nay, not unhappy, for he loved me once—
And loves me still. It was my evil tongue,
When gaudy Inez hung upon his arm
And all his face was flushed with wine, that wrought
The mischief. For my blood is hot, and all
My heart's black venom came from out my lips
To see him smile on her. Ah ! keener far
Than his keen knife were my soul-scarring words !
Can Holy Church assoil me ? Lying here,
With throbbing heart and brow, I'm happy still,
For I shall meet him where the angels stray,
And I shall greet him with a kiss of peace.

PRIEST. Nay, that can never be !

LOR. If you can wash
My guilty words away, can you not cleanse
Him of his lesser sin ?

PRIEST. No ; he is dead.

LOR. Dead ! Dead ?

PRIEST. It is too true. He scaled the walls
Wherein he was confined ; but, as he fled,
A soldier fired, and now he has exchanged
An earthly for a heavenly Judge.

LOR. And He
Is merciful.

PRIEST. To those who trust in Him ;
But not to those who mock his Holy Name
And all the Church's mysteries. The priest
Who saw him in the prison tells a tale
Of blasphemies of which I dare not speak.
Woe, everlasting woe shall be his lot.
Make you your peace with God. Blot from your mind
The wicked deeds and form of Ysidro.

LOR. Priest, you but mock me, telling of a heaven
That holds him not. What made this Alicante,
This stifling city hot with myriad breaths,
A place of bliss to me, who once had known
The morning breezes from the misty hills
Upon my brow, but Ysidro? What made
Me gladly change the careless trills of birds,
The gush of streams, the songs of vine-dressers,
For cackle of the markets and the roar
Of traffic in the streets, but Ysidro?
Heaven wanting him, good Father, were but hell.

PRIEST. Your words are wild ; be calm.

LOR. And may I not
E'er hope to meet him when my life is gone ?

PRIEST. Pure holy oil shall soothe your wearied
limbs ;

Christ's broken flesh shall feed your hungry soul ;
Upon your head His benison shall rest ;
But Ysidro has passed away unshriven.

[*A clock strikes seven*]

LOR. 'Tis now the hour, good Priest, when yonder
draught

Shall give me sweet relief from gnawing pains.
You heard the nurse. Give me the medicine.

[*Priest hands her the phial*]

Tell me, I pray you, if unwittingly
I drank too deeply of this deadly cup,
And life passed from me, should I never dwell
Amid the saints and angels ?

PRIEST. If unwittingly,
Without gross sin upon you, you might hope
To reach, at length, where all the blessed are.

LOR. Aye, but if knowingly my draught were deep ?

PRIEST. A foolish question and an ignorant.
Our lives are not our own to give or take,
But God's ; and whoso sheds the blood of man—
His own blood or his neighbour's—steals from God,
And God will surely visit such a sin
With endless woe.

LOR. But such a little life
As now is left to me—one poor short hour
Of pain and labouring breath—the mighty God
Who owns the countless lives of town and field,
And stirs the warm blood in a million hearts,

Would surely spare my little hour to me?
So light a theft should meet light punishment.

PRIEST. You said right well you had an evil tongue.
Put not your soul in peril, but be still.
You utter blasphemies against the Church,
Which ever has declared that suicide
Shall merit fires of hell. Pray, daughter, pray
That God may save you from such guilty thoughts.

LOR. Good Father, pity me and pray for me.

[*Priest gives her a crucifix and prays*]

[*Aside*] Pale Jesu, hanging on the bitter tree,
'Thou knowest well my heart. Thy love was great,
And for love's sake Thou gavest life away.
For sweet love's sake I yield up soul and heaven !
Ah ! never lead me by Thy pastures green,
Nor by 'Thy woodlands where still waters are,
For there I never should meet Ysidro.
Would I could say 'I hate Thee !' Would that I
Could spit upon Thy face ! For then, indeed,
My soul should merit hell for evermore ;
But 'Thou art lovely, and Thou diedst for love ;
And I I needs must love Thee. But the Priest
Said that it was enough to slay oneself,
And he knows all the mysteries of death.
Love, Ysidro, I come to thee.

[*Drinks all the medicine*]

Good-bye,

Pale Jesu, hanging on the bitter tree. [*Dies*]

Would surely spare my little hour to me?
So light a shaft should meet light punishment.

PRIEST. You said right well you had an evil tongue.
Put not your soul in peril, but be still.
You utter blasphemies against the Church,
Which ever has declared that suicide
Shall merit fires of hell. Pray, imagine, pray
That God may save you from such guilty thoughts.

LOVE. Good Father, pity me and pray for me.

[*Priest gives her a crucifix and prays.*]

[*Aside.*] Pale Jess, hanging on the bitter tree,
Thou knowest well my heart. Thy love was great,
And for love's sake Thou gavest life away.
For sweet love's sake I yield up soul and heaven!
Ah! never lead me by Thy pastures green,
Nor by Thy woodlands where still waters are,
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Would I could say "I hate Thee!" Would that I
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My soul should merit hell for evermore;
But Thou art lovely, and Thou diedst for love;
And I—I needs must love Thee. But the Priest
Said that it was enough to slay oneself,
And he knows all the mysteries of death.
Love, Ysidro, I come to thee.

[*Drinks all the medicine.*]

Good-bye,

Pale Jess, hanging on the bitter tree. [*Dies.*]

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